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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: THE U.S. AND TAIWAN'S UN REFERENDUM

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies gave extensive coverage on September 15-17 to the two large-scale rallies launched by the ruling DPP and opposition KMT in Kaohsiung and Taichung, respectively, on Taiwan's UN bid. News coverage also focused on the crash of a Thai passenger plane in Phuket Sunday, and on a former vice minister of the interior, who was sentenced to 15 years in jail on corruption charges last Friday. The pro-unification "United Daily News" ran a banner headline on page four on September 16th that said "Bian Confirms That High-level Dialogue Between Taiwan and the United States Has Once Been Cut Off for a Few Months." The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest-circulation daily, however, ran a news story on page two on September 15th with the headline "The United States Denies that Taiwan-U.S. High-level Dialogue Has Been Called Off." The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" front-paged the results of its latest opinion survey on its supplement September 17, which showed that the Taiwan people's mistrust of the United States rose to a record high of 37.5 percent, higher than the percentage (29 percent) of those who have trust in the United States.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" editorial said Taiwan should continue communicating with the United States patiently in an attempt to remove the latter's misunderstanding of the UN referendum. A separate "Liberty Times" editorial urged the Taiwanese people to articulate their positions on Taiwan's UN bid via the referenda and to solicit support for Taiwan's UN bid from the entire international community. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" discussed the two major rallies in Taiwan Saturday and the air raid drill in Shanghai. The article said these events "indicate that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait will not back down over Taiwan's sovereignty." An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" said it is time for Washington to open its ears to Taiwan's call for UN membership. A "China Times" editorial called the UN referendum a campaign show featuring President Chen Shui-bian alone. A separate "China Times" editorial urged the public not to underestimate the negative impact on Taiwan triggered by the UN referendum. A "United Daily News" editorial said the two major rallies in Taiwan Saturday have become a confrontation between the Republic of China and the country Taiwan. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post," on the other hand, urged President Chen not to take American friendship for granted. End summary.

A) "Taiwan Should Plan Its Next Step Following the 'Big Rally' in a Rational and Pragmatic Attitude"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (9/17):

".... Taiwan can totally disregard China's unreasonable suppression, but for the United States' opposition [to the UN referendum], it relies on our patient communication and persuasion to resolve all differences and misunderstanding. We must recognize clearly the

reality of international politics -- namely, the United States is the world's superpower and it is also Taiwan's most powerful supporter. Taiwan wants to join international organizations such as the UN, but without U.S. support, it will make [our] objective that is difficult to achieve even more inaccessible. The United States opposes Taiwan's conducting the UN referendum because it is worried that China will take retaliatory actions against the island, which will thus affect regional peace and stability. But the democratic system is the best platform for communication between Taiwan and the United States. We believe that under the universal values that we share with each other, the U.S. government will surely be able to understand Taiwan's mainstream public opinion, and it will have the moral courage to change its mind and support Taiwan's UN bid. ..."

B) "The Rally Is Just [Taiwan's] First Step toward the UN"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (9/15):

"... Even though the Bush administration is neither just nor convincing enough [in opposing Taiwan's UN referendum], which has naturally sabotaged the U.S. image, the Taiwanese people are clearly aware that the key [to this issue] lies in China. Therefore, the Taiwan people must not only articulate their positions via the referenda, but should also expand their targets to the entire international community outside of the United States, including non-government organizations. In addition, the island's first referendum held four years ago and its move to abolish the National Unification Council and National Unification Guidelines in early 2006 had all sown discord between Taiwan and the United States, but the disputes were resolved smoothly afterwards following [close] communication. These experiences proved that as friends between democratic countries, there are rarely problems that cannot be solved. ..."

C) "The Warning behind the Air Raid Drill"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (9/16):

"... So why does it matter if Taiwan holds a referendum on entering the UN? Even if an overwhelmingly large percentage of the people in Taiwan vote in favor of joining it, this would not make Taiwan a UN member. But if Taiwanese were to vote in a referendum on the UN bid, the act would represent a clear example of Taiwanese self-rule, which is intolerable to Beijing. ... With the Beijing Olympic Games just around the corner, Beijing cannot threaten Taiwan as it has before. Therefore, the job of warning Taiwan against independence activities has been left in the hands of the US, which has already publicly cautioned Taiwan against holding a referendum.

"Between Beijing and Washington, the latter obviously still carries more weight with the Taiwanese government. Unless Beijing is ready to go to war, it has very little leverage over Taipei. But what if there is something slightly less than a formal declaration of independence, such as a referendum on UN entry? It seems there is little consensus on what China would do. But one way or another, Beijing had to respond to yesterday's rally in Taiwan. The air raid drill in Shanghai clearly showed its true colors."

D) "Time for U.S. to Open Its Ears to U.N. for Taiwan"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (9/17):

"... The combined turnout of well over 200,000 Taiwan residents for the rallies comprised a forceful response to Beijing and Washington and also served as methods to mobilize backing for the presidential election campaigns by the DPP and KMT, a contest clearly won by the DPP with a display of leadership unity as well as a far larger and more spontaneous and enthusiastic turnout with a clearer and more forward-looking vision. Moreover, the rally showed that the widespread 70 percent-plus backing of Taiwan's drive for U.N. entry and the DPP referendum on applying for U.N. membership as 'Taiwan' in opinion polls is not simply a matter of passive agreement but a matter of strong emotion among a major percentage of Taiwan's

population.

"Instead of creating intimidation, the widely publicized declaration by Christensen that Washington does not 'recognize Taiwan as a state' seems to have sparked popular anger and revealed the major difference between Taipei and Washington and the fundamental reason for the opposition of the U.S. to the 'UN for Taiwan' referendum. Quite simply, for any Taiwan resident who participated in the struggle for democracy against the authoritarian KMT regime to realize the principle that 'sovereignty rests with the people' or who cherishes our democratic society absolutely cannot accept this negation of Taiwan's 'current status' as a democratic independent state that deserves to be a full member of the world community and not an international orphan. It is this fact of the public will of the vast majority of the Taiwan people that Washington policy makers and analysts seem unable to understand. ...

"Unfortunately, Washington's recent words or actions have shown that it is objectively complying with the strategic objectives of the authoritarian Beijing regime by blocking the efforts of the DPP administration and the civil society to protect Taiwan's current status as an independent democratic state. We have no intention of belittling the weight of Washington's objection. We believe the way in which the U.S. State Department has handled the delivery of its warnings to Taiwan indicates that Washington actually does realize it is putting up a show to ease PRC pressure and understands it is doing something shameful. ...

"Nevertheless, while Washington may believe it is merely attempting to deal with a peripheral 'annoyance' in its global 'war on terrorism,' the open denial of Taiwan's status as a 'state' involves our fundamental interests. ... We also urge Washington to re-examine its approach to Taiwan and to engage in direct senior level dialogue so that both sides can gain a more accurate understanding of our mutual realities and asymmetric priorities. ..."

E) "Bundling Referenda with the Presidential Election Is a Move for A-Bian to Put All the [Taiwan] People on a Short Leash"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (9/17):

"... In the wake of repeated warnings from the U.S. officials, many people were worried that U.S.-Taiwan relations would be harmed. But Chen Shui-bian not only appeared to be fearless but has also constantly and openly challenged [Washington], demonstrating an air

of being daring and ready to confront the two superpowers - the United States and China. Surely he does not have to fear anyone, because the more pressure imposed by Washington and Beijing [on Taiwan] now, the more he can harvest from the backlash of the Taiwan public. It will be the next [Taiwan] president that will have to clean up the mess Chen has left behind! ... Did anyone notice that the more heated the UN referendum issue gets, the dimmer the figures of Frank Hsieh and Su Tseng-chang become? ... The two have become followers of Chen, who is always the shining star in all the occasions promoting the UN referendum. ... This is a campaign show featuring Chen and Chen alone! ..."

F) "'Nothing Will Come out of [the Referendum]' in the End After Having Gone through So Much Trouble?"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (9/17):

"... One should never underestimate the negative impact on Taiwan triggered by the 'UN referendum!' It has not only damaged the substantive relationship between the United States and Taiwan but has also stimulated Beijing to accelerate its moves to block Taiwan diplomatically. What's even more fatal is that it has taught a valuable lesson to the international community: Namely, Taiwan's referenda are doomed to fail starting from the very beginning. Given the high threshold for the referenda and the counteracting between the Blue and the Green voters, Taiwan cannot even get to the stage of 'being unable to enter the UN even if the UN referendum is passed;' the UN referendum itself is a 'mission impossible.'

Following this round of manipulation, perhaps the United States and China have both seen through and understood this game! In other words, no matter how many times Taiwan wants to play the game of referenda, and no matter how sensitive the referendum titles may be, they are all basically impossible to be put into practice, and they are all nothing but lip service. If so, why should anyone need to worry about them? No one got it the first time in 2004, but when it is done again in 2008, everyone knows about the trick now. No one will care about Taiwan should it want to 'bundle the referenda with the presidential election' again in 2012. What does that tell us? It indicates that Taiwan does not even have the ability to be a 'troublemaker' in the future any more! ..."

G) "Take to the Streets and Join the Rally; Do Not Become Beijing's Accomplices!"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (9/15):

"... The 'UN referendum' has become the 'referendum on Taiwan independence,' and such evolvement has inspired at least three in-depth thoughts: First, do the Taiwan independence activists really 'love Taiwan,' or do they simply want to destroy Taiwan and become the accomplices of Beijing (how can Taiwan still exist if the ROC is destroyed)? Second, the 'UN referendum' has also evolved into an 'anti-U.S. referendum'. Isn't such a development stupid and ridiculous? Third, Taiwan independence has become a political ploy for Chen to resolve his crisis of corruption. Isn't it pathetic? The two rallies today have become a confrontation between the ROC and the country of Taiwan. ..."

H) "U.S. Ties Not to Be Taken for Granted"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (9/16):

"... In our opinion, President Chen has come to take good relations with the United States for granted, and this is a major mistake. If President Chen thinks the U.S. can be strong-armed into accepting his views about what will and will not provoke trouble in the Taiwan Strait, we believe he is seriously mistaken. In the end, the United States will most likely end up reducing the amount of high-level contact with our government on a permanent basis, harming not only the government of President Chen, but also all of his successors. The United States has already gotten accustomed to avoiding high-level contact with us, not least because our government has failed to be responsive to Washington's needs at a time when the U.S. government has its hands full in terms of world affairs. ... Instead of taking American friendship for granted, President Chen should try to be more considerate, accommodating and understanding about the needs of our most powerful friend."

YOUNG